

Abstract 415

TITLE: How to Work with Schools to Implement Effective HIV Prevention Policies and Programs

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ISSUE: Non-education professionals often feel confused and/or frustrated in their efforts to extend HIV prevention strategies into schools and classrooms, often due to lack of awareness of how schools are organized and managed; differences in professional training, vocabulary and attitudes; and situational pressures, priorities and political conditions.

SETTINGS: State and local administrative and policymaking settings.

PROJECT: Since 1987, this national organization's school health project staff have assisted states, school districts and I schools to implement effective policies and programs to prevent the spread of HIV. The project has produced a number of widely used publications including two editions of "Someone at School Has AIDS: A Complete Guide to Education Policies Concerning HIV Infection" (1989 and 1996). We have steadily worked to build bridges between the education sector and the health and human services sectors. "How Schools Work and How to Work With Schools: A Guide for Health Professionals" has been widely disseminated and used to orient those who seek to work with or influence schools and education policy.

RESULTS: With the project's assistance, various states have adopted policies on a wide range of health-related issues. Today 34 states require school health education on HIV and AIDS, despite the sensitivity of the subject and the reluctance of many states to impose requirements on local school districts. States have adopted policies requiring health and sexuality education in schools, requiring teachers to be trained and prepared to address health topics in the classroom, prohibiting discrimination against students and school staff with HIV infection, and fostering collaboration between health and education stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNED: Project staff have honed a number of strategies that can be used to successfully engage education decision-makers in HIV prevention efforts. One lesson is that research needs to be presented, and arguments crafted, in ways that address the priorities and concerns of policymakers and administrators. Another is that success is often a result of timing, having the right backup support, and targeting key audiences and individuals. The presenters will share these experiences so as to assist non-educators to work with schools to implement effective HIV prevention strategies.

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